recommended setting up of a Spices Development Authority in order to increase India's presence in the world market;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) the action taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) No, Sir. Production and export of spices in the country registered a substantial increase during the last 10 years with an average annual growth rate of 5.2% and 8.7% respectively. The production of spices in the country has reached 40.38 lakh tones (2004-05). The export has reached US$ 517.90 million during 2005-06. During April-June 2006, the export has reached US$ 588.85 million surpassing the previous year exports.

(b) to (d) The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce (in its 80th Report) has observed that a Spices Development Authority should be set up with the larger mandate covering research, production, value addition, domestic self sufficiency and export promotion. The Government has not taken any decision on this recommendation.

Widening Trade Deficit

1668. DR. M.A.M. RAMASWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE, AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the trade deficit of the country has widened in comparison to the previous fiscal year;

(b) if so, the details of the export-import deficit during the above period; and

(c) the steps taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) According to the latest data on trade available for the current year 2006-07 (April-Jaunary), the trade deficit was US $ 51 billion compared with US $ 34 billion for the same period last year.

(c) The increase in trade deficit during the current year is maily on account of high price of crude oil and high growth of import of capital goods and raw-materials/intermediate products required to sustain the unprecedented growth in the Manufacturing Sector. The Government is watchful of the situation but does not propose to artificially restrict imports to contain trade deficit as this may have an adverse impact on inflation.

Anti-dumping duty on steel

†1669. SHRI BANWARI LAL KANCHHAL: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether leading steel industrialists have requested Government to impose anti-dumping duty on the lines of America, to prevent the misuse by International steel companies;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the reaction of Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) As of now, no application has been filed by the domestic steel industry for initiation of anti-dumping investigation.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Import and export of agricultural products by MMTC

†1670. SHRI BANWARI LAL KANCHHAL: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Mineral and Metal Trading Corporation of India Ltd. (MMTC Ltd.) has formulated any scheme for import and export of agricultural products and for agriculture sector; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) MMTC has been regularly importing and exporting agricultural products for the last several years. The major areas of operation of MMTC in the agricultural sector are pulses, sugar, edible oil and wheat. MMTC

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.